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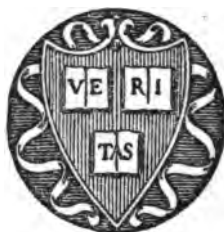
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BOUGHT FROM THE
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OUR BEST SOCIETY.

A PARLOR COMEDY.

OUR BEST SOCIETY:

BEING AN

Adaptation of the Potiphar Papers,

IN FOUR ACTS.

BY

IRVING BROWNE.

TROY, N. Y.:

PRIVATELY PRINTED.

1868.

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✓

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
SHELDON FUND
JULY 10, 1940

DEDICATED
TO
GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

JOHN POTIPHAR,

HENRY HOWARD,

TIMON CROCUSUS,

REV. CREAM CHEESE,

FOOTMAN.

MRS. POTIPHAR,

MISS HELEN POTIPHAR,

MRS. DRAGON,

CAROLINE PETTITOES,

LYDIA CROCUSUS,

SERVANT.

Note. The curtain may be dropped between the second and third scenes of the fourth Act, if time is needed for the change of dress indicated.

If practicable, a good effect may be attained by representing Scene I, Act I, in the lighted parlor of POTIPHAR's house, the guests having just gone, and POTIPHAR and MRS. POTIPHAR being in party dress. In this case Mrs. P. must omit the second sentence of her speech just before CHEESE enters, must EXIT (L.) and change her dress to a morning costume, and re-enter (L.) before CHEESE. The change of dress must be very expeditious, or if in parlor representation, the curtain may fall.

OUR BEST SOCIETY.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*A room in Potiphar's house. Breakfast table spread.*

Enter MR. POTIPHAR. (L.)

MR. P. Well, I think these follies have gone far enough. Two new carpets spoiled at Mrs. Potiphar's grand ball last night! And young Gauche Boosey so drunk that I had to send him out of the house! And then to think of Helen sailing around the parlor, in a polka, at the rate of twenty miles an hour, in the embrace of that hot and tipsy youth! Really, I don't know what our society is coming to. I sometimes think we shall all be wiped out some night like Sodom and Gomorrah. Positively, these things are too disgraceful. I'll lend them my countenance no longer. I'll not submit to have my house and child so outraged. I will not endure it another day. This is the last—

Enter MRS. POTIPHAR.

MRS. P. Last what, Potty dear?

MR. P. Last ball at my house, madam!

MRS. P. Fiddle-dee dee!

MR. P. Madam, it's no laughing matter, nor fiddling matter either! I tell you, madam, I am not going to open my house for a crowd of people who don't go away till daylight; who spoil my books and furniture; who involve me

in a foolish expense; for a gang of rowdy boys who drink my choice wines, and who don't know them from liquorice-water; for a swarm of persons, few of whom know me, fewer still care for me, and to whom I am only "old Potiphar," the husband of you, a fashionable woman. I am simply resolved to have no more such tom-foolery in my house.

MRS. P. Dear me! Mr. Potiphar, you'll feel much better when you've slept. Mustn't we see our friends, I should like to know? and if we do, are you going to let your wife entertain them in a manner inferior to old Mrs. Podge or Mrs. Cræsus? People will accuse you of meanness, and if some persons hear you have reduced your style of living, they will begin to suspect the state of your affairs.

MR. P. (*Aside.*) They may well do that. The deuce seems to be in them lately!

MRS. P. Besides, dear John, you must remember our Helen is out in society, and has her market to make;—

MR. P. Good gracious! Polly! you speak of the matter as if our daughter were a fat beeve! And now allow me to tell you, that your throwing Helen at that worthless young Timon Cræsus' head last night, was altogether too perceptible. Really, you must disguise your scheme a little more cunningly, if you expect to succeed.

MRS. P. Now, P., you're too hard. You know young Cræsus is a great catch, and why shouldn't Helen have him, and why shouldn't her mamma, who has seen something of the world, assist her in settling comfortably in life?

MR. P. Well, Polly, carry on your campaign in your own way, but remember that Helen shall never marry Ti Cræsus with *my* consent. What! the fellow is a most dismal fool, as you well know, even allowing his habits to be good. Think of his utterance—like the noise that water makes when you empty a jug! And in appearance, even, he doesn't compare with that young—what's his name?—the lawyer;—why don't you invite him and such sensible young

men oftener?—and not turn my house into a menagerie of chattering apes.

MRS. P. Oh, you mean young Howard. Why, he's well enough, and makes a very available society-man, but he is nothing after all more than a briefless attorney, down in Nassau street. I have inquired all about him, and learned that his office is up three pair of stairs back, and he has no senior partner, so he will never come on very fast. Then again, there is something very obscure about his origin. Nobody knows anything of his family. I have suspected that Helen is too much interested in him, and so have been on the alert to learn his prospects. (Oh, what *don't* I go through for my children!) He has got brains enough, perhaps, and so have plenty of others; but brains, without a sufficiency of the *substantials* of life, will never do for us.

Enter SERVANT, (L.)

SERV. Rev. Mr. Greencheese, ma'am—

MRS. P. Cream Cheese, you mean Nelly—

SERV. Yes'm—says he will be happy to call at twelve.

(Exit, L.)

MRS. P. It's that dear, delightful clergyman we met at Saratoga, last summer. You remember him, dear?

MR. P. Yes, yes—a conceited, brainless, affected, whining—

MRS. P. Oh no, no! You must be thinking of some one else. He's a real handsome man, and has charming manners. And then his voice is so soft, and his hands are so white, and he makes such graceful, wavy gestures—I'm sure he must do a great deal of good. Why don't you secure him as an assistant to old Dr. Polysyllable?

MR. P. It's the same man. He'll never do. His flowers of rhetoric are all artificial, and besides, he is too much addicted to candlesticks.

MRS. P. Candlesticks!

MR. P. I mean, he's a Pussyite,—or whatever you call it,—trying to raise the old cat in the church. I've no notion of being tied to the apronstrings of the Scarlet Woman.

MRS. P. (*Aside.*) Who can she be? I never heard any scandal of Mr. Potiphar. (*To P.*) But what is it about candlesticks? Perhaps the poor man finds gas too bright for his weak eyes, and that, I'm sure, is his misfortune, not his fault.

MR. P. Polly, please not meddle with things you don't understand. You may have Cream Cheese to dinner as much as you please, but I won't have him in the pulpit of my church. When the old Doctor preaches, I can go quietly to sleep, confident that he will say nothing that might not be spoken in any well-regulated pulpit; whereas if we should let Cream Cheese into the desk, I shall have to keep a look-out for some of his new-fangled idolatries. But what brings him here at this time of day?

MRS. P. Why, my dear, I sent for him to consult about our new livery, and some other things. He has such exquisite taste.

MR. P. Livery! Good heavens, Polly! You'll drive me mad with your nonsense. Think of old soap-boiler Potiphar's servants in livery! There would be *bars* enough in the escutcheon! Think of my grandfather, who was only a skillful blacksmith and a good citizen, and brought up a family to fear the Lord, and earn an honest living! Ah! Polly, when you first knew me, my coat of arms was much out at elbow!

MRS. P. But *my* ancestors, Mr. P., are a different matter. Starr Mole says, in his witty way, he has "climbed our family tree," and finds I am descended from one of those two brothers, who came over in some of those old times, in one of those old ships, and settled in some of those old places somewhere—a Plaintangent, I think he called it. So if birth gives any one a right to coats of arms and liveries, I'm

entitled to have them. But I don't care anything about that. The Gnus and Crœsuses and Silkes and Settum Downes have these things, and I'm not going to be behind, I tell you.

MR. P. Yes, yes, of course you'll have them, or anything else you get your silly head set on. A woman's the most obstinate animal in creation—more obstinate than a mule, even; and that's the reason, as I have heard Fred say, the ancients called her *mulier*. Well I must be off. Here I've wasted my entire morning. Don't forget the calves; everything in livery, you know, depends upon the calves. (*Exit R.*)

MRS. P. What's this about calves, I wonder? (*Pulling out watch.*) Why bless me, it's quite noon, and that cherubic Cream Cheese will be here presently.

Enter CREAM CHEESE, (R.)

CREAM. My dear Mrs. Potiphar, the sight of you is refreshing as Hermon's dew.

MRS. P. Oh, Mr. Cheese, I'm so glad you've come, for I want to consult you about several matters of taste, and you have such perfect taste.

CREAM. You flatter me, dear Mrs. Potiphar. Still, esthetics form an important component of life and religion, and attention in this direction is essential to the complete character. It is desirable, speaking spiritually, that the shepherd's crook should be gilded and the fisher's net silken.

MRS. P. And first of all, Mr. Cheese, I'm quite uncertain how to have my prayer-book bound. After thinking about it a good deal, I had concluded to have it done in pale blue velvet, with gold clasps, and a gold cross upon the side. But then, Mrs. Gnu, who sits near me, wears a blue hat, and I fear the effect of my book might be injured; you know two blues always kill each other.

CREAM. Dear Mrs. Potiphar, your taste quite agrees with mine. As your faith is so pure and childlike, and as I have observed that the light from the yellow panes usually falls across your pew, I would advise that you symbolize your faith by binding your prayer-book in pale blue, the color of skim-milk, dear Mrs. Potiphar, which is so full of pastoral associations.

MRS. P. But Mr. Cheese, wouldn't cymbals be rather noisy in church?

CREAM. I do not refer to those "tinkling cymbals" alluded to by Paulus, but to those spiritual symbols, addressing the eye of observation.

MRS. P. Oh, yes, I understand you now fully. But as to Mrs. Gnu's bonnet?

CREAM. Let us hope that obtrusive article of apparel will prove ephemeral. The fashion of woman changes. But the color of your prayer-book should be perennial.

MRS. P. Oh, thank you, Mr. Cheese; you have such a consolatory way of treating these things, and you so encourage me by solving my little doubts and perplexities, that I have half a mind to ask your advice upon another matter of ecstasies.

CREAM. Of esthetics? yes? confide in me wholly, dear madam.

MRS. P. Well you must know, I want to put my servants in livery, but Mr. Potiphar is very much opposed to it. Do you think it objectionable?

CREAM. (*Putting his hand to his cravat.*) Is not this a livery, dear Mrs. Potiphar? And shall the servants of our physical necessities do less? The scriptures recognize in many places the propriety of submission on the part of terrestrial servants to their fleshly masters: "Servants, obey your masters." And therefore it is meet and fitting to designate this submission by visible symbols. May not the band upon the hat and the buckle upon the knee denote the

closeness of the tie and the imperativeness of the obligation subsisting between master and servant in every household regulated by faith? And the footman's staff—may it not be intended to signify the dependence with which the good servant leans upon his master? These are mere suggestions, dear Mrs. Potiphar, for we can at best grasp at the latent significance of these things but darkly. But these insignia or badges, having been preserved and used for so many years, by so many highly reputable families, let us not inconsiderately discard them.

MRS. P. You have determined me. I shall at once put my coachman in livery.

CREAM. But why not have a *chasseur*, dear madam.

MRS. P. Why—I'm so sorry, but we—we haven't any in the house. (*Aside.*) It must be some French dish.

CREAM. Oh, but you could hire one, you know.

MRS. P. (*Aside.*) It must be a musical instrument—a panharmonicon, or something of that kind. (*To CREAM.*) I'm not very, very fond of it.

CREAM. But it would be so fine to have him standing on the back of the carriage, his plumes waving in the air, and his lace and polished belts flashing in the sun as you whirled down Fifth Avenue.

MRS. P. Oh, that *would* be splendid! (*Aside.*) He means those military gentlemen who sit behind the carriage, especially upon the continent, and who, in Paris, are so useful in keeping the wild beasts and savages at bay, in the *Champs Eliza*, where they are intended as a guard. (*To CREAM.*) But please don't kindle my imagination with a *chaser*, for Potiphar never can be brought to consent to *that*, and so I must be content with one full-sized footman and a fat driver.

CREAM. The corpulence is quite essential, dear Mrs. Potiphar. I have been much abroad; I have mingled, I trust, in good, which is to say Christian, society; and I must

say that few things struck me more forcibly upon my return, than that the ladies, who drive very handsome carriages, with footmen in livery, should permit such thin coachmen upon the box. I really believe that Mrs. Settum Downe's coachman doesn't weigh more than one hundred and thirty pounds, which is ridiculous. A lady might as well hire a footman with insufficient calves, as a coachman who weighs less than two hundred and ten. That is the minimum. Besides, I don't observe any wigs upon the coachmen. Now, if a lady sets up her carriage, with her family crest and fine liveries, why, I should like to know, is the wig of the coachman omitted, and his cocked hat also? It is a kind of shabby, half-ashamed way of doing things, a garbled glory. The cock-hatted, knee-breeched, paste-buckled, horse-hair-wigged coachman is one of the institutions of the aristocracy. If we don't have him complete, we somehow make ourselves ridiculous. If we do have him complete, why then — (*Coughs, and pats his mouth with his handkerchief.*)

Mrs. P. I should like to come out with a wig, — I mean upon my coachman. It would so put down the Settum Downes. But I am sure Potiphar wouldn't have it. He lets me do a great deal, but there is a line which I fear he won't let me pass.

CREAM. Well, I am not sure but he may be right. I remember an expression of my carnal days, when I was in the bond of iniquity, about "coming it too strong," which seems to be applicable just here.

Mrs. P. (*Helping CREAM to wine.*) But about the calves, meaning the limbs, I suppose?

CREAM. Yes?

Mrs. P. I should feel rather awkward in asking a servant about his calves, it would sound so queerly. And yet I must confess, it seems necessary?

CREAM. (*Sipping.*) Yes, dear madam, the path of duty is not always smooth. It is often thickly strewn with

thorns. I was sorry not to be able to attend your party last night, but I had certain vigils to keep, preparatory to the approaching Lent.

MRS. P. We had a pleasant affair—dancing. Do you approve of dancing?

CREAM. It would be presumptuous in me to condemn what has the evident sanction of Holy Writ. Is it not written that the King danced before the Lord? Possibly, however this terpsichorean exercise did not include anything resembling the so-called “round dances.” The commentaries are silent on this point.

MRS. P. We had several charming girls of our church. Why don't you marry, Mr. Cheese? There is Lydia Cræsus, now, a dear, good girl, suitable in age and tastes.

CREAM. Her father has worldly possessions, has he not.

MRS. P. Yes, he is enormously rich.

CREAM. (*Sighing.*) I could never marry an heiress, unless I clearly saw it to be my duty.

MRS. P. (*Aside.*) Beautiful resignation!

CREAM. And now I must go. If I can be of any assistance in the details of the matters on which we have communed, command me fully.

MRS. P. I will do so, thank you very much.

CREAM. Adieu, dear madam! (*Aside.*) I fear I have neglected that dear lamb, Lydia. I will go to her instantly.

MRS. P. Adieu! (*Exit CREAM, R.*) What a charming man, and how devoted to his calling! Now I must go down to Lawson's to try on my new hat, for I'm bound to be ahead of Mrs. Gnu next Sunday. Won't she die of envy! And then to Stewart's to select cloth for the liveries. Oh! if I only dared go the wig and the *chaser*! (*Exit L.*)

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*A room in Potiphar's house.*MRS. POTIPHAR *discovered seated.*

MRS. P. Well, well, it's all over, and I shall carry my point about the livery. As for our party, everybody says it was the most elegant affair of the season. To be sure there were two or three little accidents, but they occur at all large parties that I ever attended. Young Mr. Boosey drank too much, and they ruined our carpet, and knocked legs off several of the chairs, and there's a trace of wine on the brocatelle here and there. And some one knocked that elegant statuette of the Medicinal Venus off the pedestal, and broke it into a million pieces. But here comes my child. (*Enter HELEN, L.*) Well, Helen, dear, how do you feel after the fatigues of last evening? Why, you look wretchedly haggard! Sit down here by me.

HELEN. No wonder, mamma. Oh, what folly this fashionable dissipation is! We have made a great ado, and now it's all over, how much better off are we? For my own part, I think it is all lost time—worse than lost.

MRS. P. My child you don't understand these things. We owe certain duties to society. People of our class hold the same relations to society in our country, that the nobility of foreign countries do toward theirs, and these perplexities are the penalty of our station. And how much of my pains and anxiety is on your account, my child!

HELEN. On *my* account, mamma?

MRS. P. Yes, love—anxiety to see you worthily bestowed in marriage. You are now eighteen, and are growing frightfully old-maidish in your notions—blue-stockingish, if I may be allowed the expression. Now, last evening I noticed you bestowed altogether too much time and attention on Mr. Howard, and I heard you talking with him about books and

that sort of thing. This will never do. You are to be a leader in our best society, and you mustn't become engrossed in books. It's well enough to read the last novel or poem—Enoch Ardent, or Mr. Thackuary's Virgins, for instance, because now and then you'll have to entertain literary men. It's quite the style to invite them, and they don't dance, you know. But nothing beyond. And as for marrying any Mr. Howard, of course that is entirely out of the question.

HELEN. Pardon me, mother dear, but that is not so clear. I have a great regard for the gentleman in question, and although he has not spoken to me of matrimony, yet he is worthy, in my opinion, of any woman living.

MRS. P. Helen, it will never, never do. He may be a very nice young man, but he hasn't any expectations, and what would a girl like you, brought up in luxury, do as the wife of a poor young man? To think of your being obliged to give music lessons, or do plain sewing!

HELEN. Oh, dear me, mother, it is not quite as bad as that. Henry—I mean Mr. Howard, has already quite a growing income from his profession, so I've been told, and with his talents he cannot fail.

MRS. P. Now, Helen, don't ever call me "mother" again, at least in public, as you did last night. It makes me seem so old. If you want to say anything, call me "mamma"—there's a young sound to that—or "auntie." They say it is quite the style for young ladies to call their mothers "auntie," when in public. Now, as for young Howard. I shall never try to control your choice of a husband, but you are young and haven't seen so much of human nature and society as I have. Why, dear child, you have spent only one season at Newport, and have never been at Saratoga at all. If you will allow your mamma to advise you, Timon Croesus is a much more advantageous match for you, and he's clearly in love with you.

HELEN. Well, mamma, I don't think it necessary to spend a summer at any watering-place, in order to be able to tell a fool from a gentleman.

MRS. P. I admit, Helen, that Timon is not so *very* talented, but he makes some pretty bright speeches, now and then, which show what he is capable of if he would apply himself. Oh, Helen! if I could only see you Mrs. Timon Cræsus, my happiness would be complete. To think of his being carried off by that affected Georgiana Downe or that artful Caroline Pettitoes! Really, I never should survive it!

HELEN. No, mamma, we've got money enough in the family, and what we want now is brains. But here comes some one to interrupt us.

Enter SERVANT, (R.)

SERV. It's the man, ma'am, as wants the footman's place.

MRS. P. Oh, yes, show him right in. (*Exit SERVANT, R.*)
(*Aside.*) Oh, dear, now for that shocking calf business!
(*To HELEN.*) Dear, I think you'd better go now, for I may be detained some time by this fellow. We will talk further on your affairs. (*Exit HELEN, L.*)

Enter FOOTMAN, (R.)

MRS. P. Well, James, I'm glad you've come.

FOOT. Please, ma'am, my name is Henry.

MRS. P. James, the name of my footman is always James. You may call yourself what you please; I shall always call you James. (*Aside.*) The idea of the man's undertaking to arrange my servants' names for me! (*To FOOT.*) Have you brought your references with you?

FOOT. Yes, ma'am. (*Giving her papers.*)

MRS. P. (*Examining them.*) Quite satisfactory, James, but—(*Aside,*) now for the terrible calf matter! (*To FOOT.*) Well, James—

FOOT. Yes, ma'am?

MRS. P. I wish—yes—ah!—

FOOT. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. P. James, I wish you had come in knee-breeches.

FOOT. (*Surprised.*) Ma'am!

MRS. P. In knee-breeches, James.

FOOT. What be they, ma'am?—what for, ma'am?

MRS. P. Oh, nothing, nothing—but—but—

FOOT. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. P. Your—your—legs, James!

FOOT. Good heavens, ma'am! what about them?

MRS. P. Why, I must see them, James!

FOOT. Oh, Lord, ma'am! what for? You're the first missus as ever wanted to see my legs! (*Runs behind a chair.*)

MRS. P. Why, you see, James, I shall want you to wear livery, and I naturally need to know if your—your calves are sufficient. (*Aside.*) The path is thorny, sure enough!

FOOT. Oh, ma'am! I couldn't wear a livery, ma'am. Never did such a thing in my life, ma'am!

MRS. P. James, you must not dictate to me. I do not permit my servants to impose conditions upon me. I am willing to pay you good wages and treat you well, but my servants must wear my livery.

FOOT. I'm very sorry, ma'am. I know I should like the place very much, and the wages is satisfactory, and I think I could suit you, ma'am; and I would try to be a good servant, ma'am; but I can't put on those things, ma'am, and make a fool of myself. I hope you won't insist, ma'am, for I am very anxious to get a place.

MRS. P. I *do* insist, James, and if you can't wear my livery, you won't suit me.

FOOT. I'm very sorry, ma'am. I hope no offence, ma'am, but I never could do it, ma'am; and so I suppose I must say good-morning, ma'am. (*Exit R.*)

MRS. P. Dear me! The path of duty *is* hard! And so I've got to go through this horrible calf business again, I suppose. (*Exit L.*)

Enter HOWARD, (R.) shown in by servant.

HOW. Why, how my heart throbs! Worse than when I rose to make my maiden speech in the great Quicksilver case. But I must know my fate. I shall be wholly unfit for my business until it is determined. I think Helen knows, and does not disapprove my regard for her, but—ah! here she comes.

Enter HELEN, (L.)

HELEN. Ah! Mr. Howard? I did not expect to see you so soon again. But you are welcome. (*They sit.*)

HOW. I passed the remnant of last night restless and sleepless, and have sought you at this unseasonable hour, to know whether my future is to be all sunshine, or whether I am to go out from this house, an unhappy, disappointed, blighted man. Miss Potiphar—Helen—I have known you but a few short months, but in that time have learned to love you, oh, how deeply! I love you devotedly, unchangeably—forever. I have watched you in the whirl of fashion and gaiety, and have marked you as one superior to this aimless life. Sometimes I have even dared to think that you looked on me with no unfavorable eye. Have I been mad, mistaken, presumptuous? Oh, let me know the worst at once, Helen! May I—dare I hope? My heart tells me I may—but my fears—speak to me, dear lady!

HELEN. Henry, it would be false to say that I have not been—that I am not—more partial towards you than I have dared to own to my heart. You do not think me unmaidenly? No, no—why should I endeavor to hide my feelings from one so worthy of my affection? Henry—I do—love you!

How. (*Taking her hand.*) I was not then deceived! I have hesitated, doubted, prayed; but now all my troubles are solved. How happy one little word has made me! This hour is the fruition of years of labor and struggle.

HELEN. Oh, Henry! I fear you expect too much from me. I am only a feeble girl, and I feel so inferior to you in everything save love.

How. And the very purity of that love makes you my superior. I am perfectly conscious that I have no real standing in society—that I am not invited to the houses of the leaders of fashion on account of talents or mental accomplishments, but because I can talk small nothings, dance, sing, play the agreeable and convenient beau for scores of young ladies, who would deem me mad should I aspire to their hands. In short, I am not *rich*. And then, Helen, there is another thing you should know. My birth is obscure. I know not if there be one of my blood upon the face of the whole earth. I do not even know my descent, nor whether I am the lawful offspring of any one. All that I have been able to learn of my history is, that I was washed ashore on the stormy coast of Long Island, a wailing babe, lashed to a portion of the wreck of an Atlantic packet, inward-bound; that I was found and succored by the widow of a poor fisherman, who had recently lost her own babe, and who supplied its place with the ocean-tossed foundling. My protectress removed to this city while I was yet very young, and died when I was only fifteen years old. I have since lived, I hardly know how, in this great Babel, where I have struggled up and on during all these weary years, sustained by nothing but the hope that I might prove to be the child of fond and honored parents, and the desire to bring no disgrace on their memories, should their name and station ever be discovered. And do you, Helen, accept this poor waif, possibly the child of shame?

HELEN. Having given you my heart, it matters little to

me whether you are noble or obscure of birth. If you are friendless, it is for me to prove the nearer and dearer friend to you. No, no, dear Henry, I have not lightly plighted my love. But as for mamma, to be candid, I think she would be reluctant to bestow me in marriage on any but a rich man.

How. Oh, that you too were penniless, that I might prove my devotion and my honor!

HELEN. Henry, we must not misunderstand each other. Papa thinks highly of you; but as for mamma, we must wait, and trust to her natural goodness of heart to work in our favor, for I should never be happy in marrying without her full approval.

How. You are right, dearest. You shall teach me patience. But only love me! I will repay you in time.

HELEN. (*Giving him her hand.*) There is my hand. (*He kisses her hand.*) Why, Harry, how can you? (*He kisses her lips.*) Oh, worse and worse! There—that will do! Hush!—here's some one coming.

Enter SERVANT, (R.) giving HELEN card.

HELEN. (*Reading.*) Mr. Timon Cræsus. Lack-a-day! (*To SERVANT.*) Show him in. I suppose I must see him. (*Exit SERVANT, R.*)

How. Angels and ministers of grace! I must be off.

HELEN. No, please don't desert me. Besides, this is your *rival*, mamma's favorite; although I think he's more in love with Carrie Pettitoes than with me. Stay and help me through with the call.

How. I'm all obedience. But he's a more finished bore than the Hoosic Tunnel.

Enter CRÆSUS, (R.)

HELEN. Good-morning, Mr. Cræsus, how do you do?

CRÆS. Pwetty well, thank you, Miss Pawtiphar. I twust you are well this chawming mawning?

HELEN. Yes, thank you. Mr. Cræsus—Mr. Howard.
(*They bow coldly to each other.*)

CRÆS. (*Aside.*) Howard? Good name, but a very ill-dressed fellow.

HOW. (*Aside.*) What an insufferable coxcomb! I'll have some fun out of him.

HELEN. You're a great stranger, Mr. Cræsus. I've hardly seen you since your return from Europe, except at our party last night. You have quite neglected us of late.

CRÆS. Yaas?—no—the fact is, I've been sufferwing terwibly from sea-sickness ever since I set foot on terwa firmaw, as the ancients used to call it.

HELEN. But you had a very fine time in Paris, I suppose? You visited the picture-galleries?

CRÆS. Oh, yaas, did them all. Pwodigiously fine, but verwy fatiguing, especially when the fashion wequires one to wear upwight collahs.

HOW. Yes, it must be. Byron always wore rolling collars, so as to be able to study the frescoes on the ceiling of the Vatican without inconvenience.

HELEN. How I should like to visit those collections of art! To see all those beautiful Raphaels, Correggios, and Titians! Pray, Mr. Cræsus, which of Correggio's works did you most admire?

CRÆS. Well, weally, it's difficult to say,—they are all vastly fine, but it stwuck me that his *shay-dooover* was about as good as any.

HOW. I don't think I saw that. He must have painted it since I was at Paris.

CRÆS. Verwy pwobably. You see, I suppose these old masters are turning out works all the time, eh? They must employ a good many hands, eh? By the way, I purchased a verwy ware picture in Parwis, a Julia Womano, or something of that sort—beautiful thing, verwy indistinct and dirty, combat of cavalwy. You see it was painted for

an old Fwench family, whose heir had become weduced in circumstances, and had to part with it.

HELEN. How very sad!

CRÆS. He was a verwy fine-looking man, dark hair, heavy moustache, and a stwikingly-pwominent Hebwew nose. He used to come ewevy mawning, to visit the picture and learn what chance there was for its sale. I got it quite a bargain. He said, to any one in Fwance the pwice should be eleven thousand fwancs, but as I was an Amerwican, and the picture would go out of the countwy, a thousand fwancs should be deducted. He quite wept when he parted with it.

How. You got it reasonably; in fact it was *dirt* cheap. I don't suppose there are more than ten or twenty artists here who would paint ten or twenty times as good a picture, for a quarter of the price.

HELEN. But after all, Mr. Howard, they would not be "old masters." Well, Mr. Cræsus, I suppose you visited all the haunts of genius and fashion?

CRÆS. Yaas, oh, yaas—did all the opewas, and theatres, and cemeterwies, and churches, and gaming-houses, and—

HELEN. Gaming-houses!

CRÆS. Pwecisely—and that weminds me of a little pun—little conundwum I made—why is a gamester like a lamb?

HELEN. Gamester like a lamb?

How. Because he is fleeced?

CRÆS. No, no, that isn't it. Ha, ha! D'ye give it up?

How. Yes.

HELEN. Yes.

CRÆS. Because he gambols on the gween. Ha, ha! See it? Gambols—kicks up, you know,—turns somersets—that sort of thing you know. Gween—baize, you know.

HELEN. Oh! very good, Mr. Cræsus. I fear that you were quite wild in Paris. Didn't any of those beautiful Parisian ladies of nobility fall in love with you?

CRÆS. Can't say; couldn't give them any encouragement, being a wepublican, you know. But I had quite a womantic little flirtation with a verwy pwetty young lady in a shop.

How. Oh, a shop-girl?

CRÆS. Yaas. I had often wemarked her watching me when I was buying anything in the shop. The moment I entered she always fixed her eyes on me, and they were large, and lustwous, and a little mournful in expression. She was evidently disappointed whenever I left without speaking to her. Daily for a week I walked past the door, and she was always looking after me with the most eager interwest. So I determined one day to follow the matter up. I entered, went up to her, and asked her in my most wavishing tone, for a pair of gloves!

How. Didn't she show any embarrassment?

CRÆS. No, the Fwench women are so twained to conceal their emotions, that she did not betway, by any twembling, or turning pale, or stammerwing; the pwofound intewest she felt for me, but quietly looking in my eyes, she asked me in a stwain of sywen sweetness, what number I wore.

HELEN. What wonderful self-command!

CRÆS. I weplied that the size of *her* hand was about wight for *me*; whereupon she smiled bewitchingly, and selecting a pair of exquisite shade, pwoceeded to fit the glove on my hand herself.

HELEN. Rather forward, it seems to me.

CRÆS. Well, it didn't stwike me so at the time. And then when I inquired for cwavats, she tied one about my neck herself; and the wesult was I bought an immense amount of such lumber, and after that I never passed the shop without purchasing fifty fwancs or so. All the west of our fellows were weady to expire with jealousy, for she never had any eyes for any but me.

HELEN. And Mr. Cræsus, you saw some of those magnificent churches?

CRÆS. Oh yaas, vewy fwequently; and that weminds me, Miss Pawtiphar—what do you do when you first go into church, and put your head down?

HELEN. Why, how do you mean?

CRÆS. Why, when we go into church, you know, we all put our heads down in front of the pew, or in our hands, for a little while, and Dr. Polysyllable spweads his handkerchief on the desk, and puts his head into it for quite a long time. What do you do?

HELEN. Why, it is to say a short prayer.

CRÆS. Bless my soul! I never thought of that.

HELEN. What do you do, then?

CRÆS. Well, you know, I think it's a capital thing to do; it's pwoper, and so forth; but I never knew what people were weally at when they did it, so I always put my head in my hat, and count ten. I find it comes to about the same thing. I get thwough at the same time with the other people.

HELEN. What a wag you are, Mr. Cræsus!

HOW. But I've been thinking you had a very narrow escape from that young lady who sold you cravats and collars.

CRÆS. No! What d'ye mean?

HOW. Did you notice whether they sold there the Persian Hair Dye?

CRÆS. Yaas, they did. Sign of a female with long hair, sitting cwoss-legged and smoking an enawmous pipe.

HOW. The very place. You see, the Emperor of Persia ransacks all parts of the known world, to procure beautiful youths to wait upon his wives, and it's rumored that he employs these French girls to betray elegant young men like yourself into his hands, where they become his miserable slaves, and pass their lives in his harem.

CRÆS. Good-gwacious! how howible! Why, he's a wegular Bwigham Young, isn't he? I shudder at my escape. But I must bid you good-mawning, dear Miss Pawtiphar,

for I have an engagement to meet Cweam Cheese,—you know him?

HELEN. Yes, a very charming man.

HOW. And of noble blood.

CRÆS. Aw? How so?

HOW. He's descended from the De la Cremes of France—an ancient Huguenot family, founded by Creme de la Creme, who came over with Charlemagne the Conqueror, and left a branch of the family in England, whose descendants, intermarrying with the Cheeses of Huntingdonshire, took the name of Cream Cheese.

CRÆS. Dear me! what a thing blood is! I always thought he was a vewy supewior person, and this accounts for it. When I was in Pawis, I heard of parties among the De la Cwemes, but never happened to be pwesent at one. Well, I must weally go. *Au wevior*, as the Fwench say.

HELEN. Adieu! (*Exit CRÆSUS, R.*) (*To HOWARD.*) Did you ever see such an extraordinary creature? But how could you tell him those ridiculous stories about the Emperor of Persia and the Cream Cheeses?

HOW. Well, if they are not true, they answer his purpose just as well. And now, dearest, I must be gone. Don't forget what I have said to you, and let me know very soon when I may again see you.

HELEN. Henry, I can never forget you. Let us behave discreetly, and hope for a more favorable disposition on mamma's part. Good-bye! You shall hear from me very soon.

HOW. (*Embracing her.*) Adieu! (*Exit, R.*)

HELEN. Dear Harry! How considerate and reasonable! I could never have loved any but him. What a contrast to that tiresome Ti Cræsus! How light my heart is!—I feel just like singing. No, I don't—I feel more like crying. Why, what a foolish creature I am!—there! (*Drying her eyes.*) But I don't believe he loves me half so well as I

do him. Men never do. If I thought he did, I shouldn't be half so happy. It's a real luxury to feel so. I wonder if I can't see him from the window? (*Goes to window.*) Yes, there he goes! (*Waving handkerchief.*) Oh, he's actually kissing his hand to me! (*Drawing back, and then advancing.*) Well, here's my whole heart, dear, dear Harry! (*Kisses her hands to him, and runs out of room, L.*)

END OF ACT II.

ACT. III.

SCENE I.—*A Room in Potiphar's House.*

Enter POTIPHAR and MRS. POTIPHAR, (L.)

MR. P. Polly, what are those long rows of gilded blocks for, that I saw lying in the hall as I came in?

MRS. P. Blocks? Oh they must be for the library.

MR. P. How for the library?

MRS. P. You see, dear, books are enormously high now-a-days, and so I had these blocks made, and painted, and lettered in imitation. They'll answer every purpose. Of course nobody ever takes books down, and for that matter we can hide the key if necessary. I got old Vellum to do the thing up right. There isn't a book among them that a gentleman's library shouldn't be without, as old Mole says.

MR. P. Well, well, I knew almost everything else in the house was sham—sham bronzes, sham rosewood, sham plate—but I hadn't dreamed that there was any possibility of shamming a library. However, it will do well enough for the *blockheads* that attend your parties.

MRS. P. Yes, and do you know there's another thing I want, and that's a *prie-dieu*.

MR. P. Pray do what?

MRS. P. Stop, you wicked man! I say, I want a kneeling-chair.

MR. P. A kneeling-chair!

MRS. P. A *prie-dieu*—a *prie-dieu*—to pray in, you know.

MR. P. Oh, Lord! what next?

MRS. P. And then, Potiphar, we need some new paintings.

MR. P. What do you want new paintings for?

MRS. P. Why, to furnish the walls, to be sure.

MR. P. I tell you, Polly, paintings are the most extravagant kind of furniture. Pshaw! A man rubs and dabbles a little upon a canvas two feet square, and then coolly asks three hundred dollars for it.

MRS. P. Dear me, Pot, I don't want home-made pictures—what an idea! Do you think I'd have pictures on my walls that were painted in this country? No, my dear, let's have some choice specimens of the old masters. A landscape by Rayfel, for instance; or one of Angel's fruit-pieces, or a cattle-scene by Verynees, or a Madonna by Giddo, or a boar hunt of Hannibal Crackeye's. Singe, the pastry-cook, tells me his cousin has just come out from Italy, with a lot of the very finest pictures in the world, which he bribed one of the Pope's guard to steal from the Vatican, and will sell at a bargain.

MR. P. Oh dear! yes, go it, go it!

MRS. P. And Pot, don't you think we're getting dreadfully down town?

MR. P. How do you mean?

MRS. P. Why, everybody is building above us, and there are actually shops in the next street. Singe, the pastry-cook, has bought Mrs. Cræsus' old house.

MR. P. I know it, and old Cræsus was sorry enough to go. But this house is good enough for me, and so is the furniture. Do I want buhl *escruterics*? Do I need *or muly* things? Do I know anything about pictures or statues? In the name of heaven, do I want rose-pink bed-curtains to give my grizzly old phiz a delicate "auroral hue," as Cream Cheese says of your complexion? No, no, I want none of these things. But still, Polly, perhaps I may gratify you in this. Unless some change takes place in my affairs, we will soon move into another house, further up-stream.

MRS. P. How, "unless some change takes place?"

MR. P. Why—unless something unforeseen happens.

MRS. P. Oh, yes—there's a dear, good, old Pot. But don't look so gloomy over it. When we get into our new house you'll never regret this.

MR. P. Well, Polly, I believe you may be right. (*Aside.*) I can't tell her yet. (*To MRS. P.*) But I must go out for a while, and will talk with you further about this matter. (*Exeunt L.*)

SCENE II.—*A room in Mrs. Dragon's house.*

POTIPHAR, *discovered seated.* Enter MRS. DRAGON, (*L.*)

MRS. DRAG. Now, Potiphar, what on earth do you want of me? You haven't darkened my doors in three years.

MR. P. Susan, it hasn't been my fault. You chose to have our intimacy cease.

MRS. DRAG. True enough, John, and you know the reason. Your wife's patronizing conduct was enough to drive me mad. Because I put my knife in my mouth, and had some phrases that Mrs. Cræsus didn't use, she presumed to correct me. No, no, John, she and I never could hitch in the world. But your daughter, Helen, called on me the other day—a sweet lovely girl; I wanted to hug her right

up to my old heart. How she reminds me of my sister, Jennie, who is a saint in heaven, I trust—that is, if there be any heaven or any saints, which I am sometimes led to doubt, when I look around this cheating, hypocritical, back-biting canting, lying world.

MR. P. Now, Susan, my business with you is on Helen's account. You were the wife of my esteemed partner, and when I am in trouble, is it not natural for me to counsel with you? The truth is—and I may as well out with it, for the whole world will know it to-day—I am a ruined man, a beggar, or but little better.

MRS. DRAG. John, you petrify me!

MR. P. It is too true. Possibly a few thousand may be saved out of the general wreck, but my creditors shall have their due, if it takes every cent.

MRS. DRAG. Right, John! Better become a county charge than bring disgrace on the reputation of the ancient and honorable house of Dragon & Potiphar. But how did this happen? Mercy on us, man!—I thought you worth a million!

MR. P. The crisis of 1857, and the failure of several of my heaviest debtors, caused the opening crack. But that was a mere trifle. Then the rebellion brought the repudiation of over six hundred thousand dollars of Southern debts. And now the "Alabama" has burned three of my best ships and cargoes. This was the last straw.

MRS. DRAG. I'm glad it wasn't gold or petroleum speculations.

MR. P. No, I've kept clear of that madness, but Croesus and Pettitoes are on the brink of ruin in this sort of thing.

MRS. DRAG. Yes, yes,—same old story—greedy dog saw the shadow of the meat in the water, and wanted it. But about Helen?

MR. P. I hope to save enough to buy a small farm, where I can take Polly, away from city frivolities. But

Helen—in short, I want to get her away from her mother's influence—you understand me? I want you to take her as a companion, until she can marry discreetly, or some change takes place in my affairs. Will you do this for your departed husband's friend?

MRS. DRAG. Poor child!—of course I will, and if she can derive any warmth from this frosty and embittered bosom, she shall nestle there. John, you have my sympathy for your misfortunes. I only hope you incur no moral disgrace in this reverse—

MR. P. No Susan, no man can look John Potiphar in the face, and avow that he ever wronged him to the extent of a mill!

MRS. DRAG. Ah, that my dear old John! Well, well—must you go? I'll come down to your house this afternoon, if you think Polly won't snap my head off, and talk over these matters. Good-bye! (*Exit POTIPHAR, R.*) It has been a great cross to me, since the death of my husband, and my sister's terrible fate, that, childless, and without one of my blood in existence, I couldn't be intimate at Potiphar's house. His wife is such a—well, there ain't words enough in Webster's unabridged illustrated Dictionary to express my contempt for that woman. But Helen—thank heaven! I've enough to make her independent, although few dream of such a thing. When I've been saving and saving all these years, little did I think it was to be for Polly Potiphar's young one! I supposed it would go to the Society for the Relief of Aged Respectable Indigent Females, or to found the Dragon Lying-in Hospital, or the Dragon Emancipation Fund, or some such humbuggery. But so it is; she shall have an independence—that is, if she marries to suit me, for I won't have her throw herself away on any of those empty-headed, brazen-faced, stuttering young dandies who are fawning around her. They'll all take wings fast enough, though, when find her father's

riches have done so. But young Howard—he's a different fellow entirely. I think he's all he should be, but he must be tested;—and if he should turn out, as my lawyer, old Mole, insists—but he dotes, it can't be. No, I will not allow myself to believe it for a moment—I've been so often disappointed. But in a few hours I shall know; this journey with Mole will tell the story. (*Exit L.*)

SCENE III.—*Room in Mr. Pettitoes' house.*

TIMON CRÆSUS and CAROLINE PETTITOES, *discovered seated on sofa.*

CAR. (*Aside.*) Oh, if I can only fix him, father may move into the country, and joy go with him.

CRÆS. (*Aside.*) So the guvnah has burst up, and says I must go to work for a living, and this is the easiest way I know of. (*To CAROLINE.*) Ma dear Miss Pettitoes! How can you have been so long blind to ma passion? I love you to distwaction, demme if I don't now. Oh, do not turn away that angelic head! Favor your miserwable admiwer with one smile from those sweet lips! Thus do I cast myself at your toes—(*Spreading his handkerchief on floor and kneeling on it*) your feet, dear Miss Pettitoes, and swear by all the planets and the fixed stars I will not arwise until you say you will weturn my love.

CAR. Oh, Mr. Cræsus!—this is so unexpected! Your devotion and fervor quite overpower me. Really, I feel quite—quite faint—(*falling back on the sofa.*)

CRÆS. (*Aside.*) Hooked, by Joopiter!

CAR. (*Aside.*) He's mine! (*Rising.*) Pardon my emotion, Mr. Cræsus, but this is so unlooked for! I will not deny that your graces of manner and intellect have made a deep impression on me, but I thought you entirely devoted to Helen Potiphar.

CRÆS. Aw, Helen is well enough, but in the pwesence of your supewior chawms, dear Carwoline, she is as the flickerwing, miasmatic light of the whip-poor-will—aw, the will of the wisp, I should say—to the outgushing, unpweecedented glorwy of the—the—camewa obscoorwa!

CAR. Oh, thank you, dear Timon,—you *do* turn a compliment so handsomely!

CRÆS. Yaas, that's the way it stwikes me.

CAR. Ah! how happy we may be!—our tastes so congenial, our station and fortunes not unequal—

CRÆS. Yaas—we'll have a mansion on Murway Hill—

CAR. A country-house on the shore of the Sound—

CRÆS. A cottage at Sarwatoga,—

CAR. A box at the Opera—

CRÆS. My club and billiards—

CAR. My phaeton and Shetland ponies—

CRÆS. My twotters, supewior to Bonner's—

CAR. Receptions all winter, with Gottschalk and Brignoli sometimes—oh, Timon, what happiness!

CRÆS. That's the way it stwikes me. Say, Carwoline, when shall the happy day be?—the sooner the better for your impatient and distwacted lover—but I suppose you'll wequire a few weeks to pwepare?

CAR. No, dear, I hate formal weddings. Let's have just a quiet affair,—traveling-dress, a slight repast, and—

CRÆS. Cweam Cheese?

CAR. Oh, of course. Well, suppose we say—

CRÆS. Toosday next? But your pawents?—

CAR. We'll count them out; I never allow them to dictate to me. And yours?

CRÆS. Same way, it stwikes me. And now dearwest Carwoline, allow me to place upon your fair finger this twifling sooveneer of my affection. (*Puts ring on first finger of her left hand.*)

CAR. Oh, isn't it lovely! Amethyst and pearls—

constancy and purity — (*Aside.*) I wish it had been diamonds. (*To CRÆSUS.*) Dear Timon, you *are* a love! (*Embracing him.*) And now you must go, for I've no time to lose.

CRÆS. Well, Carwoline, I tear myself away. Adoo! (*Aside.*) Pwetty well done, I fancy. I'll go tell the guvnah I've earned *my* living. (*Exit R.*)

CAR. Ah, ha! my young man, I've fastened you at last. All the girls will die of envy. I suppose his fortune will be something colossal. Well, I can tell mother that *I'm* fixed for life. (*Exit L.*)

SCENE IV.—*Room at Potiphar's.*

POTIPHAR, MRS. POTIPHAR, and HELEN, *discovered seated*,
POT. and HELEN *on right*, MRS. P. *on left*.

MR. P. Spare me your reproaches, Polly.

MRS. P. But I shall die of vexation. What will the Settum Downes say? and the Cræsuses, and the Pettitoes? How Mrs. Gnu will crow, and go around, snuffing, and saying "What did I tell you?" Potiphar, you're really too bad to treat me in this way. I have not deserved it. (*Sobbing.*) And then to be forced to go into the country, where one sees nothing but acres of snow in the winter, and acres of grass in the summer, and never a brick nor iron fence, and hears nothing but tree-toads, and crickets, and bull-frogs, and such cattle. Oh, why was I ever born?

HELEN. Dear mamma, I have no regrets save for poor papa. We can live very happily together in the country. Think of a cottage overgrown with honey-suckle and ivy, and of milk from our own cow, and cheese of my making; and papa can take care of our sober old Dobbin, and we can have a man to do the heavier work;—why, I think it will be quite delightful.

MRS. P. Oh, I see through it all! You're all in a con-

spiracy to reconcile me to it; but I won't be reconciled! And just as I had my new livery all arranged and selected.

MR. P. As for that, my dear, you will never be without a footman in the country—in fact we shall *all* have to go afoot; and as for *calves*, you'll see them to your heart's content.

MRS. P. Oh, very fine, Mr. Potiphar, to make sport of your wife's misfortunes! And what, allow me to inquire, is poor Helen to do, cooped up in the country—no society, no beaux, no nothing!

MR. P. My dear, I have made provision for Helen to remain for the present, at least, in the city, at Mrs. Dragon's.

MRS. P. Now, P., this is the meanest insult of all. To give our dear Helen to that old termagant!

HELEN. No, no, papa dear. I see through your kind design, but do you think so poorly of your dear Helen, as to imagine for a moment that she could ever leave you? No, never, papa! You couldn't do without your pet daughter to sit on your knee,—now, could you?—could you? (*Embracing him.*)

MR. P. (*Affected.*) Now, God in heaven bless you, my dear, true child! My reverses go for nothing, when they disclose this affection for your old and broken father. I should miss you, I do not deny it; but for special reasons I desire you to comply with this arrangement. It may be for my good—certainly for yours.

MRS. P. On second thoughts, Helen, perhaps it would be as well. Mrs. Dragon may yet adopt you—who knows? Stranger things have happened. If she should, I would forgive her all the injuries she has heaped on me.

HELEN. For shame, mamma! what mercenary views!

MR. P. Now, Polly, may I trouble you to come to my study a moment? I want a few private words with you.

MRS. P. (*Aside.*) Mercy on us! What will he say when he knows the extent of my bills, and the expense of

our last party? (*To P.*) Yes, in a moment. (*Exit POTIPHAR, L.*) (*To HELEN.*) Seems to me young Howard hasn't been here of late? How are matters between you and him?

HELEN. Mamma, we are affianced. I can't but think he must have been called away on business.

MRS. P. Well, it's a great pity you didn't secure Cræsus. I imagine from all I can learn, that he and Caroline Pettitoes will make a match. But Howard is better than nothing. "Half a loaf," you know, my dear. (*Exit L.*)

Enter MRS. DRAGON, (R.)

HELEN. Well, dear auntie, you find us in affliction. But after all, we've lost nothing but our money.

MRS. DRAG. True enough, unless you have lost your beau. What's become of your Harry Howard? I wouldn't have thought he could be one of your fair weather friends.

HELEN. I am distressed beyond measure at his not coming. Oh, if *he* has deserted me! (*Falls on MRS. D.'s neck.*)

MRS. DRAG. Well, if he has, there are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught.

HELEN. No, no, my Harry's equal doesn't live! Don't you say a word against him; I won't hear it—even from you.

MRS. DRAG. There, there—it shan't be bothered any more; it shall have its own way. But, seriously, I think it's high time he came. (*Bell rings.*) Hark! there's a ring! Perhaps—

HELEN. Oh, my heart! Oh, please retire a moment—if it is only he! (*Exit MRS. D., L.*)

Enter HOWARD, (R.)

How. (*Embracing her.*) What! sweet one,—in tears? What has vexed you?

HELEN. Oh, Harry, Harry! Why have you been so long away? And have you not heard?

HOW. Heard? what? no, nothing! I have been unexpectedly absent from town three days, and on the instant of my return have flown to you. Quick! tell me!

HELEN. Henry, you never spoke a word to me, however light, that has not sunk deep into my poor heart; and I remember, oh, how vividly! at our last happy meeting, these words: "Oh, that you were penniless, that I might prove my devotion and my honor!" Henry, that time has come!

HOW. Great heaven! Helen, what do you mean?

HELEN. Henry, my father is a ruined man; we are all beggars; I am perhaps even reduced to the necessity of daily labor; I *am* penniless!

HOW. And thus do I prove my devotion and my honor!
(*Kissing her hand.*)

Enter MRS. DRAGON, (L.)

MRS. DRAG. Kings should kneel to you, young man! Give me your hand!

HOW. Mrs. Dragon! Why, how's this? I thought—

MRS. DRAG. (*To* HOWARD, *aside.*) Hush! not a word! (*To both, aloud.*) Forgive me, children,—I am no eaves-dropper. But you have said and done nothing to be ashamed of. It does so cheer my heart to witness one spark of honor and virtue in this depraved world! Young man, you're a credit to the human family. If you'll excuse me for saying so, I'd really like to—to hug you! (*Offers to embrace him.*)

HOW. My dear Mrs. Dragon, I should esteem it an honor. (*They embrace.*) Yes, madam, except for the distress to her excellent parents,—

MRS. DRAG. (*Aside.*) Parent, he means.

HOW. I rejoice that my Helen has lost all that rendered us in the world's eyes unequal. Now she is dependent on

me alone. I was always a little jealous of her expectations; now all she has is mine — *she* is wholly mine! Is it not so, dearest?

HELEN. Yes, dear Harry, but don't say that all the dependence is on *my* part; you need my sympathy, my society, my love; and you shall have—you have them all.

MRS. DRAG. (*Wiping her eyes.*) Upon my word, a very pretty love scene! Young people, I guess I'd better be off. (*Exit R.*)

How. Excellent old soul! But now, Helen, you must take me to the library, and tell me all about it. (*Exeunt, L.*)

SCENE V.—*Room at Cræsus' house.*

Enter TIMON and LYDIA.

CRÆS. Well, sistah, my mattahs are arwanged for life. I have pwoposed to Carwoline Pettitoes, and am accepted.

LYD. I wish you joy, Ti. And do you know,—Rev. Mr. Cream Cheese yesterday proposed for my hand, and is to have his answer to-day?

CRÆS. Aw, Cweam Cheese is vewy well. By the way, his aunt in England died wecently, leaving him a large fortune — perfectly enawmous, so they say.

LYD. Ah, indeed! Did you hear how much?

CRÆS. No, but he has wecently consulted my banker about investing twenty thousand pounds sterling, and actooally deposited five hundwed pounds with him,—just the custom-away first slice, I suppose. And then, Howard, the barwister infawms me, that he is of verwy distinguished descent—the *de la Cwemes* of Fwance—Cweme de la Cweme came over with Charletan the conjuwor, I think he said;—there's an immensely long tail to it.

LYD. You don't say, Ti! Why, that's splendid! That's a very famous family; I've often heard of them.

How nice it would be to marry into such a great family ! As for money, we got enough of that, you know ; what *we* want is blood. This determines me. (*Pulling out her watch.*) Why, it's almost two, the hour he's to come for his answer. (*Bell rings.*) Hark ! there's a ring !

CRÆS. Yaas, a *wedding-wing*, it stwikes me ! Ha, ha ! Well, I suppose I must make twacks. (*Aside.*) If she only secures the pwoperty, hang the blood ! (*To LYDIA.*) He's a shepherd who won't have to get his *living* by hook or *cwook*, eh ? Ha, ha, ha ! (*Exit L.*)

Enter CREAM CHEESE, (R.)

CHEESE. And how is this dear lamb of my flock to-day ? And has she consented to choose her unworthy servant for her earthly guardian and supporter ?

LYD. After conscientious reflection, Mr. Cheese, I have determined to accept your proposals, mainly with the purpose of aiding you in the labors of your arduous and responsible ministry.

CHEESE. Truly, a blessing is vouchsafed unto me ! Dear Lydia, it has not been without a severe struggle that I have been brought to recognize the propriety of my marrying, under any circumstances. The priests of one great church, at least, have for ages remained celibate. For a long time, too, the known riches of your father were a great cross to me. I was long obstinate on this point. But my eyes have been opened. In the recent death of my trans-Atlantic aunt, and her dedication of a very handsome proportion of her accumulations to her unworthy nephew, I can perceive that the lesson is intended, that I should not allow worldly considerations to stand in the path of my evident duty. I accept the lesson and the boon in a spirit of obedience and humility.

LYD. Oh, Mr. Cheese ! you have such a beautiful way of saying these things !

Enter TIMON, (L.)

CRÆS. Yaas, that's the way it stwikes *me*. Allow me to congwatulate you, my dear Cheese, on your choicè. I had no ideah that you were contemplating this sort of thing, when I engaged you for my little affair.

CHEESE. Thank you, dear brother. I have struggled long and painfully in resistance to what seemed temptation. Your sister *has* consented to put her hand to the plow. (*To LYDIA.*) And now, methinks, there should be no unnecessary procrastination of what is apparently our duty. I suppose our nuptials need not be ostentatious?

LYD. A few days only will be needed. And I think, Timon, a quiet wedding would—

CRÆS. Yaas, that's the way it stwikes *me*.

CHEESE. And so we will consider the preliminaries settled. (*Curtain falls.*)

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*Room in Mrs. Dragon's house.*

MRS. DRAGON and HOWARD, *seated.*

MRS. DRAG. So, Howard, old Mole seems pleased with the result of his journey?

HOW. Yes, in his grim and quiet way, although I could not get much out of him on the subject. I am convinced, however, that he had something else on his mind, for while I was busy in your matter, he would be absent most of the time, occasionally rejoining me.

MRS. DRAG. Just like the lawyers; killing two birds with one stone; charging one journey to two different clients. Had you ever been in that neighborhood before?

How. Not to my recollection; and yet everything looked strangely familiar to me, probably because I was brought up, as I understand, near the ocean, and somewhere along that coast. The inhabitants are quite primitive; they stared at me as if I were some extraordinary being.

MRS. DRAG. They are not much used to visitors, I suppose. And now, how much am I in your debt?

How. I leave that entirely to you, madam.

MRS. DRAG. Well, that's more liberal than most of your profession; they don't generally *leave* anything to the client. Well, I will pay you what old Mole says is right, to-morrow afternoon, at four o'clock, at which time I want you to come here, bringing Helen with you. Her parents will also be here, with some others. If I am not present precisely at the hour, make no reference to me in any way,—mind that, now.

How. I will do so. Till to-morrow afternoon, then adieu. (*Exit HOWARD, R.*)

MRS. DRAG. How my heart goes out toward that boy—a noble fellow! I was always strangely attracted to him, and now that the truth is known, it seems not without reason. Mole's proofs are perfectly satisfactory, in fact overwhelming. I think my boy has been sufficiently tried, and will make Helen a capital husband. And now to prepare myself for the scene of to-morrow afternoon. I must show these upstarts, standing on the brink of pecuniary ruin, how I shall return the abuse and contumely which they have heaped on me for half a generation. (*Exit L.*)

SCENE II.—*Room in Cræsus' house.*

TIMON, LYDIA, CAROLINE, and CHEESE *discovered seated, after breakfast; TIMON reading the "Tribune," CHEESE reading the "Herald."*

LYD. Well, Caroline, everything passed off very nicely. I do so like a quiet wedding!

CAR. They are much the style now-a-days. None but the lower classes make large weddings. And how elegantly Cheese married us!

LYD. Yes, I think he does such things very gracefully; quite a contrast to old Dr. Polysyllable.

CAR. Stupid old fellow! I nearly froze to death, he was so mortally slow. But how absorbed our husbands seem to be in the morning papers. (TIMON and CHEESE start suddenly and simultaneously.)

CRÆS. Good-gwacious!

CHEESE. Merciful heaven!

CAR. What's the matter?

LYD. How you frighten me!

CRÆS. (*Reading.*) "Anothaw failure. Only a few days since we were ahead of all our contempowawies, including the Satanic Pwess of this city, in announcing the disastwous failure of John Pawtipher, Esquire, of the old mercantile house of Pawtipher & Dwagon; and now we have to chwonicle the bankwuptcy of Pelatiah Pettitoes, Esquire, the gweat bankah of William stweet. Some ideah of the pwobable extent of the influence of this occurwence upon our business community may be obtained, when we say that the liabilities are upwards of twenty-thwee hundwed thousand dollahs. The cause of this gweat cwash is pwesumed to be over-operwations in petwoleum." Yaas, that's the way it stwikes me.

CAR. Oh! I'm so faint!

CRÆS. It stwikes me I'm the one to faint.

LYD. But what are you staring at so, dear Cheese?

CHEESE. Verily, the ways of Providence are inscrutable. (*Reads.*) "Another Extraordinary Development.—Reckless Financeering in High Life!—We presume the minor prints of this city, including that unscrupulous sheet edited by Poor Massa Greely, will open their dull eyes at this announcement; but it is nevertheless true that Christopher Crœsus, the old, influential, and long-established real-estate broker of Wall street, has been compelled to make an assignment for the benefit of creditors. His liabilities are estimated at over two millions of dollars, and he is helplessly and irremediably bankrupt. The cause of this startling disaster is reported to be extravagant expansion of gold-speculations."

LYD. Oh, I never dreamed of this! Horrible! Timon, did you know it? Oh, why didn't you tell me?

CRÆS. Well, the twuth is, I was so absowbed in a little speculation of my own, that it entiwey escaped my memowwy.

CAR. Mr. Crœsus, you have basely, grossly deceived me! You obtained my hand under false pretences! But I won't stand it—I'll consult a lawyer—the marriage is utterly void, I'm convinced!

CRÆS. Yaas, that's the way it stwikes me—void of money. But you are not the only individual deceived, madam. I too have been cheated, done, bamboozled, by Joopiter! My virgin affections twifled with in this mercenary, pecuniawwy manner!

LYD. But why so downcast, dear Cream? Although I am not rich, *you* have a sufficiency for both.

CHEESE. (*Groaning.*) Therein I have been in error. It only serves the more forcibly to illustrate the fallibility of human judgment. The advance of five hundred pounds sterling, which I supposed the precursor of a golden shower,

proves to be at once the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, and my pecuniary prospects are left indeed parched and barren.

LYD. But your noble and wealthy relations, the *de la Cremes*?—Will they not assist you?

CHEESE. My grandfather, Sage Cheese, of New Jersey, is indeed a man of fortune. But—

LYD. No, no—I mean the great French family from which you are descended.

CHEESE. My dear Lydia, I have no such descent. My grandfather, as I said before—

LYD. Oh, bother your grandfather! Oh, you base man! But I'll see if justice can't be done.

CAR. Oh, oh! to think of what the world will say!

CHEESE. My usefulness in the church circumscribed!

CRÆS. Turned out of my club!

LYD. Every woman in the avenue laughing at me!

CAR. Where are my country-house and Shetland ponies?

CRÆS. And my yacht must be sacrificed!

LYD. The meanest of all is to be a poor clergyman's wife! Cold meats sent in, and donation parties once a year! Ugh! And not even to marry blood—*that* would in a measure have made up for the loss of money.

CHEESE. "The woman tempted me, and I did eat."

LYD. Disgraced—

CAR. Deceived—

CRÆS. Bamboozled—

CAR. And to think of living in some cross street, in a block, perhaps compelled to take boarders!

LYD. And of my carrying around things to the church's poor, and circulating subscriptions! Now, Cheese, where's the bread and butter to come from?

CRÆS. That's the point—where's the ice-cwearn, and bwandy, mewingoos, and all the other necessawies of life to come fwom?

CHEESE. He who fed the Israelites will not desert us.

CRÆS. That would be vewy well if we were Iswael-ites;—Pwvidence has always fed that wace, even down to this pewiod of time, vewy bountifully. But here's something. (*Enter SERVANT, L., giving notes to LYDIA and CAROLINE.*)

LYD. (*Reading.*) "Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Cream Cheese are invited to be present at Mrs. Dragon's residence, No. 30, Potiphar Square, at 4 o'clock this afternoon, to attend the reading of her will." Mercy on us! is that old woman dead?

CRÆS. Is it possible that horwible female is defunct? I expewience a feeling of welief.

CAR. I had not even heard of her sickness. My note is the same. But don't you see?—we must have been mentioned in her will!

LYD. The old lady was very abrupt in her manner, but had many good qualities. Oh, Cream! if it should be so, I feel that I could overlook the past!

CHEESE. My estimable companion, Providence has evidently happy days in store for us. At the worst, I have my profession. Let us have faith. (*They embrace.*)

CAR. Now, Timon, we may as well make the best of a bad bargain. And if the old lady *has* done anything for us, we must in decency accept it.

CRÆS. That's the way it stwikes me. We shall all get along well enough. Cheese may "stwike *ile*,"—ewvery church has its *aisle*, you know—ha, ha, ha! At any wate I have my—my bwains. I can make jokes for Bwyants' Minstwels. Let's weconstwuct. (*They embrace.*) And now to pwepare our mourning. (*Exeunt L.*)

SCENE III.—*Room at Mrs. Dragon's house.*

All the characters except MRS. DRAGON, discovered seated; TIMON, CAROLINE, CHEESE, and LYDIA (on R.) in street mourning habits; POTIPHAR, MRS. POTIPHAR, HELEN, and HOWARD (on L.) in house dress; the former in affected grief; the latter staring at them in astonishment.

CAR. (*To HELEN.*) Dreadful affliction, isn't it?

HELEN. Why, not so *very* dreadful to me personally; I'm sorry for you, though, Carrie, as you seem so much to regret it. (*General expression of horror by Caroline, Timon, Lydia, and Cheese.*)

HOW. Well, for my part, I don't think we younger people need regret the occurrence a whit. It's only to be mourned on account of the older ones. (*Similar expressions of horror as above.*)

CHEESE. Let us hope that her loss may prove our gain.

MR. P. That's a queer text in this connection.

CRÆS. (*Aside.*) They seem to take it vewy coolly on that side of the room. Guess they don't get much by the will. But I don't like the appearwance of their being divested of their outer apparwel. It looks as if they were in possession, and meant to stay.

Enter MRS. DRAGON, (L.) with papers; TIMON, LYDIA, CHEESE, and CAROLINE rise in confusion and astonishment.
MRS. D. *comes forward to centre.*

CAR. Oh, mercy!

LYD. Oh, mercy!

CRÆS. Why, why, what the devil do you mean, Mrs. Dwagon, by coming to life in this manner? It's vewy iwegular. I'll have you arwested for wesurwectionizing!

CHEESE. Truly, the day of miracles seems again at hand.

(POTIPHAR, MRS. POTIPHAR, HELEN, and HOWARD *looking inquiringly at one another.*)

MRS. DRAG. Sit down, good people, sit down, and be easy. I am not dead, nor have I said I was. I invited you hither to hear my will, it is true; but why can't I make, read, and execute my will before I die? I shall be sure of its being carried into effect, which is by no means certain if I leave it to my heirs and the lawyers. But I had recourse to this little stratagem to entice you here, judging that you would all be so happy and so absorbed in your marriages, that nothing less than the death of a dear friend like me could have power to startle you out of your dreams.

CRÆS., CHEESE, LYD., AND CAR. Oh! (CRÆS. and CHEESE *cut the weeds off their hats, and LYD. and CAR. take off their gloves.*)

MRS. DRAG. You will now have the goodness to preserve silence, and refrain from billing and cooing a few minutes, while I read my will. (*Seats herself at table in centre, opens papers, and reads.*) "I, Susan Dragon, widow of Snap Dragon, of the city of New York, being of sound and disposing mind, memory, and understanding, blessed be God for the same; and not being particularly feeble in body, but mindful of the uncertainty of human life and earthly riches, do hereby make, publish, and declare my will, though possibly not my last one, in manner and form following, that is to say: First: As I don't owe a cent, my debts need not give my executrix, hereinafter named, any trouble. Second: As I owe no favors to Timon, son of Christopher Cræsus, of New York,—having never been treated by him with anything but disrespect, but as my late husband was indebted to said Christopher for business favors during his lifetime, and as said Christopher has become bankrupt, and said Timon hasn't got brains enough to earn his own living, I deem it my duty to, and I do hereby, give and bequeath unto said Timon, a commission, already procured by me, constituting

him first lieutenant in the regular army of the United States, and the sum of one thousand dollars, to buy his necessary apparel and equipments; the latter upon condition, however, that he accept said commission, and forthwith report for duty." (*Giving papers to Cræsus.*)—There are your commission and check, Timon.

CAR. (*To CRÆSUS.*) Come, sir, let us not stay here to be insulted.

CRÆS. But, good gwacious, Mrs. Dwagon! I'm not fit for the position. I should become so agitated in action, that the battle would all be over before I could say to my twoops, F—f—f—fire!

MRS. DRAG. Silence, Timon! (*Reads.*) "Third: Being under precisely similar obligations to Sage Cheese, grandfather of Cream Cheese, husband of Lydia Cræsus, and actuated by the same motives and the same evident necessity in respect to said Cream, I hereby give and bequeath to said Cream a chaplaincy in the army, and the like sum of money, for the like purpose, on the like condition." (*Offering papers to CHEESE, who declines them.*) Here are your commission and check, my esthetic friend.

CHEESE. My dear madam, I have not hitherto felt my vocation to be in the direction of the tented field. My profession is not warlike.

MRS. DRAG. (*Reads.*) "Fourth: My dear friend, John Potiphar, partner of my late husband during the latter's life, having been unfortunate in his old age, and lost his property, and having sustained his reverses like a Christian and a philosopher, without murmuring or repining, I hereby give and bequeath to him the sum of sixty thousand dollars, in money, trusting that his wife, Polly, will now, during the remnant of my days, permit me to eat with my knife, or with my fingers if I choose." (*Giving JOHN paper.*) Here's your check, John.

MR. P. My dear Susan—

MRS. DRAG. John, don't interrupt me. (*Reads.*) "Fifth: My dear young friend, Helen, daughter of said John Potiphar, having, while she supposed herself rich, affianced herself to Henry Howard, whom she knew to be poor; and the said Howard, having, after he discovered said Helen to be a beggar, nobly and honorably persisted in his engagement, an example on both sides worthy of emulation by all their acquaintances; and the said Howard proving to be the son and lawful heir of my deceased sister, Jane, lost at sea twenty-five years ago; I hereby give, devise, and bequeath unto said Helen and Henry, and their heirs forever, my house in Potiphar Place, where I now reside, and the sum of sixty thousand dollars in money." (*To HELEN and HOWARD.*) Here, my dear children, are the check and deed. (*Giving them papers.*)

HELEN. Oh, my dear, kind benefactress!

HOW. Am I awake or dreaming?

MRS. DRAG. Hush, children, don't interrupt the course of the law. (*Reads.*) "Lastly: All the rest, residue, and remainder of my property, amounting to about the sum of"—(TIMON, LYDIA, CHEESE, and CAROLINE bend eagerly forward)—"blank thousand dollars, I keep myself; and fearing that my will may not be carried into effect after my death, I hereby appoint myself sole executrix, to effectuate it during my life. Signed, sealed, &c., &c." I guess there are witnesses enough present, ain't there? Well, good people, there's my will. How d'ye like it? It seems to me to be a great improvement upon the common method.

CRÆS. It doesn't exactly stwike me that way.

CAR. Come, Mr. Cræsus. Mrs. Dragon, I spit upon you and your gifts. I wish the rest of you joy! (*Exeunt CRÆSUS and CAROLINE, R.*)

MRS. DRAG. Good-bye, stupidity and deceit!

CHEESE. I do not think my sphere of usefulness lies longer in this meridian. Come, Lydia. (*To MRS. DRAG-*

ON.) Madam, I forgive you. (*Exeunt CHEESE and LYDIA*
 R. CHEESE *taking his papers from the table.* How. *crosses to R.*)

MRS. DRAG. Good-by, hypocrisy and credulity! But I'll be bound, those ruffled gentlemen will use their commissions yet. Anything to get away from their wives! (*Crosses to R. of HOW.*) And now, my dear Henry,—don't stand there in such a maze. You are my own nephew. There's no doubt of it. The proof is clear. The ship's name—the Petrel—the same as that from which you drifted ashore, a naked baby; the fact that the only family on board with a young child, was my dear lost Jennie's; your identification by old residents of the neighborhood as the boy brought up by the fisherman's widow; all this and much more render it as certain as that the sun shines. Oh! the long, doubting, watching, waiting hours that I have spent for twenty-five years in this seemingly hopeless search! But it's all repaid when I clasp to my aching heart my noble, handsome, brilliant, *honest* Harry Howard! (*Embracing him.*)

HOW. I thank thee, heaven, that one of my kin yet lives. But oh! my mother—what of her? I shall go mad with joy and suspense.

MRS. DRAG. You shall know it all, Harry, and that very soon. And now, about your bill?—

HOW. Oh, aunt, that is over-paid. (*Turning to HELEN.*)

MRS. DRAG. Well, now we're all happy. Your old friend has done some little good, and hopes to live to do much more. Let the false and giddy world eschew me as it may; I know where to look for sympathy and love; and in the companionship of my darling ones, I trust my journey will be peaceful, until I rejoin my loved and lost above.

MR. P. Yes, life is full of blessings as well as sacrifices, but how small the sacrifices in comparison! I have only relinquished my dreams of power founded on wealth—

HOW. And I the luxury of marrying a beggar—

MRS. P. And I my new livery—

HELEN. And I—but why dwell on my sacrifices? (*To audience.*) Dear friends, among our blessings we esteem your kind approval of our humble efforts. And now, our evening's task is done, and it only remains to say,—we have endeavored to point the moral, that intermixed with much fairly meriting our ridicule, and even our reprehension, there is yet an ample leaven of devotion, honor, and true Christian charity in OUR BEST SOCIETY.

Curtain falls.

Position of Characters: .

(R.) MRS. DRAG., HOW., HELEN, POT., MRS. POTIPHAR. (L.)

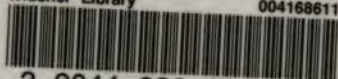


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